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Challenges in land use planning around Australian airports

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Challenges in land use planning around Australian airports

ABSTRACT

The privatization of major Australian airports has unleashed an unprecedented development wave as corporate lessees have implemented ambitious business plans. While planning and environmental regulations governing on-airport development have been significantly enhanced, there has been national disquiet about a governance regime which remains under the auspices of the federal government and is not effectively integrated into state and local decision making machinery. Tensions in major airport regions have been exacerbated by the building of highly conspicuous shopping centres, office blocks, hotels and other non-aeronautical developments which have been approved with no determining input by local decision-makers as well as the growing attraction of off-airport locations for aviation-related development. We provide an overview of the general structure of airport-related planning controls for federal airports and the development which has transpired on them since 1996. We discuss how development has challenged urban planning across a range of issues drawing on data from the National Aviation Policy Review process in 2008-09. Projected policy initiatives may provide more consultative opportunities but do not explicitly acknowledge the fundamental spatial construct of the airport region.

Keywords:

Urban planning
Airport region
Privatisation
Australia
National Aviation Policy Review

1. Introduction

The development of airports and surrounding municipal regions has posed considerable challenges for regional planning governance (de Jong, 2008; Prins, 2008; Schaafsma et al., 2008). The need for the better articulation of spatial governance structures is apparent in Australian airport settings but has rarely been explicitly addressed in policy terms. An explanation relates the federal structure of government which creates little space for robust regional and sub-regional strategies, a concentration in the political arena on localised ‘across the fence’ issues between airports and immediately surrounding jurisdictions, and the continuing skew in public debate toward noise as the dominant airport planning concern. This has changed over the past five years in Australia.

Against the backdrop of more than a decade’s experience with a national privatised airport regime, land use planning in Australia has evolved to be an important issue with capital city airports and surrounding municipalities. Considerable controversy has ensued with airports developing non-aviation related land uses on airport property (Freestone et al., 2006; May and Hill, 2006; Stevens et al., 2009; Stratford and Wells, 2009). The differences in planning goals between the privatised airports and surrounding jurisdictions have created tensions with respect to compatibility of land uses and the delivery of infrastructure.

This paper provides an initial overview of the general structure and evolution of planning controls for federal airports and the development which has transpired on them since 1996. We focus on the changing role of airports in Australia over the past decade and how this has challenged urban planning across an extensive range of issues.

There are five main sections to the paper. First, a historical review of airport planning within the context of the Australian system of government provides the critical institutional context. Second, a description of the main elements of the unique planning regime for airports is provided. Third, we survey the emergence of community concern with airport planning that has emerged in the privatised era. Fourth, we then present a comprehensive overview of pertinent contemporary planning issues associated with airport development. This section, the longest in

the paper, introduces and draws on submissions made to the national government's aviation policy review in 2009. In matters related to airport infrastructure, this important initiative foreshadows a more cooperative and transparent decision making framework to better align airport and broader community interests and concerns. Content and discourse analyses of published submissions provides a detailed disaggregation of airport planning and infrastructure issues in Australia. This section leads next to a canvassing of options for more integrated planning and the absence of a strong spatial vision in national government thinking at the present time. What is highlighted through these analyses is a continuation of the historical divide between airport and mainstream urban and regional land use planning, and the decision-making cultures and attitudes associated with them, that Australian policy makers must bridge through more effective collaborative governance structures.

2. Background: planning structures and history

The tripartite arrangement of the Australian structure of government involves federal (control over national laws and issues), state (creators of complementary laws especially in relation to urban development), and local tiers (servicing community needs through detailed structures and strategies originated and implemented within the framework of state and territory legislation, with separate systems for all the major jurisdictions) (Williams 2007). Within this hierarchy, airports have been largely a national responsibility in Australia since the 1920s. Under the Australian Constitution of 1901 all land owned by the Commonwealth is immune from State laws. When a State law is inconsistent with a Commonwealth law, the latter prevails. Moreover, while some state controls have been accepted, the Commonwealth retains the right to pass its own laws to override State law on any Commonwealth-owned land. These provisions have caused sporadic conflicts over many years over different types of specific developments especially when new development has departed from historical use rights. The fact that ultimate control of major airport development remains with the Commonwealth has fundamental implications for appreciating the planning issues which have arisen.

The Commonwealth's direct role in managing airports (cf. aviation safety and security considerations) has nonetheless been progressively reduced across the decades. By the late 1950s there were over 170 'federal' airports, reduced to 81 by 1981, and to just over 20 by 1988 by a devolved ownership transfer program, mainly to local councils. Allied to the evolution of state-based planning systems, this has meant that the majority of airports, particularly in regional Australia, come under a combination of state planning controls and local area environmental/development plans. While not necessarily without controversy in some localities, this trajectory has simplified governance arrangements in regularizing airports under a state government statutory land use regime in line with the vast majority of other development.

Applying to airport land use, state planning plans and strategies cover four relevant types - general land use planning directives, regional planning aspirations and structures, aviation-related statements, and some airport specific instruments. The first two types assume similar guises. General planning policies and directives relate to fundamental planning concerns from traffic to biodiversity, and impact on a range of land uses apart from airports. Regional strategies provide a higher spatial level of resolution. Until the 1980s, major airports were conceived by most regional planning strategies as highly specific transport nodes. However, in metropolitan areas the most common designation is as 'specialised activity centres' in recognition of their status as significant employment clusters and gateways for economic growth through passenger and air freight movements demanding a high level of regional accessibility. For example, the latest Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney (2005) doubly designates Sydney Airport and environs as a specialised centre generating 'metropolitan-wide benefits' with over 36,000 jobs, about a third of which are at the airport itself, and as the southernmost hub of a so-called 'global economic corridor' anchored by the CBD and arcing through Sydney's job-rich inner, central and affluent northern middle ring suburbs. This status is intended to focus sustainable growth measures, infrastructure provision and transport planning by providing general guidance to State agencies, State-local government decision-making, and detailed local area planning. It is acknowledged by the airport but is not necessarily binding on its actions which ultimately are regulated by separate national legislation which, when it ranges into noise and height restrictions for safety and amenity reasons, does have an indirect impact on state controls.

The second pair of state planning instruments are more targeted but less universal. Aviation-related and airport-specific directives usually relate to more expressly securing adequate noise and safety buffers around airports. The overriding goals are to protect significant infrastructure assets from incompatible development which might adversely affect long-term safety and operational efficiency as well as protect the environment of nearby communities through noise mitigation. Examples of such planning instruments are Queensland State Planning Policy 1/02 on 'Development in the Vicinity of Certain Airports and Aviation Facilities' (revised 2002) and S. 117 Direction No. 3.5 'Development near Licensed Aerodromes' (2007) under the New South Wales Environmental and Planning Assessment Act. Airport-specific instruments are similarly concerned with minimising incompatibility. Three relevant examples are Western Australia State Planning Policy No. 5.1 'Land Use Planning in the vicinity of Perth Airport' (February 2004), State Planning Policy No. 5.3 'Jandakot Airport Vicinity' (March 2006), and the Melbourne Airport Environs Strategy Plan (2003) and Overlay (2007) to ensure curfew-free operations. These noise-based controls use the ANEF (Australian Noise Exposure Forecast) system as a land use planning tool with the line for acceptability of residential building construction drawn at 20 ANEF with noise mitigation required between 20-25 ANEF. There have been moves toward a more holistic approach integrating a fuller set of planning considerations through the concept of the 'airport environs planning zone' which could encompass the development of community visions such as 'airport-related economic centres' (DOTARS, 2003). The main impact has been through declaration of wider buffer areas not based solely on exposure to aircraft noise. However, the most recent national statement retreats to a more traditional spectrum of concerns such as in planning for compatible development in terms of noise, protecting compatible airspace through height controls, and securing adequate public safety zones (Australian Government, 2009)

All these universal state-based controls where current sit alongside and must be factored into the statutory local environmental and development plans made by councils, the most ubiquitous instrument for land use planning nationally. Provisions differ across state boundaries, but the dominant recognition is of airports as 'special use' land use zones, with some schemes also

differentiating between core, ancillary and airport business zones depending on the scale of the operation and with noise and airspace protection buffers overlain.

The narrative of the airports remaining under federal control is more distinctive. In 1988 the Federal Airports Corporation (FAC) was established to inject a more systemic commercial management sensibility (Eames 1998), however, the planning regime did not fundamentally change and the airports largely remained ‘black holes’ outside the normal ambit of state and local planning controls. The FAC’s publication *Town Planning for Airports* (1993) underscored the importance of good cooperation between airport and town planning procedures but otherwise speaks to a different era. No formal procedures for airport master plans are identified other than following general ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) guidelines. Public exhibition of proposals was recommended primarily for public relations purposes because the plan ‘should be capable of withstanding the same test of public scrutiny, comment or objection that is required for a local authority planning scheme’, but there was no statutory requirement to do so. Non aviation uses were conceived only in a minor supplemental way as noise buffers which need not necessarily be even taken into account in assessing economic impacts. The land use planning function as it affected nearby areas was thus conceived in narrow and traditional terms as serving two purposes only – providing for airport needs such as obstacle limitation surfaces and to ensure that airport operations cause minimal impacts on the environment and community (Federal Airports Corporation, 1993). It was left to airports, state governments, and local authorities to devise collaborative and consultative structures to promote actual alignment of airport and surrounding area planning.

This FAC era reflected the early influence of neo-liberalist thought and in retrospect can be seen as an interim step toward the full privatisation ushered in by the *Airports Act* 1996. The latter legislation, one of the boldest initiatives of its kind in international terms, envisaged a ‘balanced’ policy direction, in which the burden of new transport infrastructure would be transferred from government to the private sector but subject to new checks and balances to protect community interests. The leasehold sales, all with options for 99 years, were to mostly private consortia and were conducted in several stages between 1997 and 2003, raising \$8.5 billion (Hooper et al.,

2000). While new planning and environmental protection requirements were set in place, ultimate approval still remained firmly with the Federal Minister for Transport.

3. A new approvals regime for federal airports

The *Airports Act* has been amended several times since 1996 but its basic provisions remain. Under the Australian Constitution and as detailed in S. 112, the Act prevails for airport land to the exclusion of State (or Territory) laws relating in particular to land use planning and the regulation of building activities. Key requirements of the planning approvals process are preparation of master plans for twenty-year planning horizons every five years, major development plans for any proposed work costing more than \$20 million (increased from \$10m in 2007), and designation of building comptrollers for approval of minor development. Formal public exhibition requirements are stipulated. Both master and major development plans must now address ‘consistency’ (or lack of) with local and state planning schemes, a provision that does inject some acknowledgment of the external planning environment. Development and plan approval rests with the Commonwealth Government in Canberra and specifically the relevant elected Minister, currently the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Parallel processes have been put in place for the drafting of airport environmental strategies also updatable for five year planning horizons. These also require the concurrence and ongoing scrutiny of a separate Minister administering the federal *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*.

In all respects, the new planning requirements are a significant advance on the evaluation and approval framework provided for under the FAC and earlier. For the airport operators, at least, it is far more demanding, more inherently consultative, and at times administratively burdensome particularly because of the additional demands of the EPBC Act. However, there has been national disquiet building for some years that the governance regime under the auspices of the federal government alone is not effectively integrated into state and local decision making machinery. An exchange at the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport inquiry into the Airports Amendment Bill in early 2007 between the Committee

Chairman and the Deputy Secretary of the-then Department of Transport and Regional Services captures the introspection of federal law in relation to relevant off-airport matters:

CHAIR—Does your planning cease at the airport gate?

Mr Mrdak—It does, although, in reviewing master plans and major development plans, the act requires the airport to identify the consistency—or, where not consistent, the inconsistency—with state and local planning regimes. So we do look at that and, in our advice to ministers in relation to master plans and major development plans, we draw attention to and do an assessment of the consistency with state planning regimes and of where projects may or may not be consistent with those regimes.

....

CHAIR—I understand all that, but does your planning stop at the airport gate and does that make a lot of sense?

Mr Mrdak—There is no doubt that we have limitations. Our regulatory powers stop at the airport boundary. We can only advise in relation to where we see potential impacts off airport.

While there are informal coordinative mechanisms for some airport regions, these are usually not statutory or legally-binding arrangements. Intergovernmental communication and cooperation for major development and master plans and various strategic initiatives is thus handled by a variety of ad hoc forums, workshops and working relationships for sharing and discussing information with stakeholder groups, usually commonwealth, state and local representatives, airport and airport tenants, and community interest groups. Examples include the Adelaide Airport Consultative Committee (established by the airport in 1998 and now with an independent chair), Canberra Airport Aircraft Noise Consultative Forum, Brisbane Airport Community Forum and the Sydney Airport Community Forum (established by the Commonwealth Government in 1996), the latter three bodies all concerned primarily with noise impacts. Increasingly sensitive to community concerns, in May 2007 the responsible federal department released guidelines for public consultation by airports. Without ceding any formal decision-making responsibility, these guidelines identified liaison with state/territory governments and local councils as critical because of their roles in providing ‘complementary off-airport infrastructure’ and potential implications for regional planning (DOTARS, 2007).

4. The impacts of privatization on airport development

Until the recent global economic crisis, the predominant trend in Australian aviation has been growth. The number of passenger movements through all airports increased from 51.6 million in 1991–92 to 104.9 million in 2005–06, 80% of that traffic being through main capital city airports. The forecast national passenger traffic in 2025 is estimated at 227.9 million (BITRE, 2008). In parallel with these trends has been an unprecedented development wave as all privatised airports implemented ambitious business plans. Since 1997, over \$2.2 billion has been invested at leased federal airports with commitments for a further \$4 billion in the near future (Australian Government, 2008a). Privatised airports have been described as an economic ‘jet engine’ whose collective and cumulative contributions to GDP are making them a key sector in the national economy with Australia leading the world in the development of ‘air cities’ (TTF, 2007). The contrast with general depictions of lagging investment in public transport infrastructure is stark (Atkinson et al., 2007).

Development around airports has intensified with the growth in passenger (and freight) traffic and in response to the accessibility and agglomeration advantages of an airport-oriented location. In Sydney, for example, conspicuous off-airport development has included new commercial car-parking and accommodation facilities, mixed use precincts (Discovery Point at Wolli Creek), and preparation for a large scale business park (Cooks Cove). However, not only have millions of dollars on new airside and landside infrastructure been committed, airports have also aimed at maximising returns from commercial development to minimise the uncertainty of dependence on aeronautical revenues in line with global trends (Graham, 2008; Morrison, 2008). The prospect of market opportunities from property development and commercial initiatives was a key factor in the high prices secured for airport leases from the late 1990s (Freestone et al., 2006). An indication of the scale of commercial investment and the transformation of major airports into mixed use centres is provided by the inventory of major development plans at Australian airports between 2003 and 2008 listed in Table 1.

The turn to the commodification of airport land has played out differently around the nation's airports depending on a varied mix of land and locational opportunities. Brisbane Airport has unsurprisingly embraced the 'airport city' philosophy in whole-hearted fashion with Schiphol as a major shareholder. The airport has a large greenfield site of 2700 ha and has embarked upon a long term development of a series of specialised business, retail, industrial, and aviation educational precincts. In Canberra, between 1998 and 2008, the number of airport businesses increased from 70 to 180 and the Airport is similarly intent on maximising the growth of further business. Its showpiece, Brindabella Business Park boasts landmark five star sustainable office buildings. At a smaller scale, Adelaide Airport is following suit with a discount factory outlet complex, business and export parks, and a flagship Ikea store at the airport main entrance. The brickworks on Perth airport were a particularly controversial development, as were proposals floated by the more land-locked Sydney Airport for either a cinema complex or retail business park late in 2005. Property development has become a critical part of airport business plans via a variety of implementation models as a way of diversifying risk and has underlined the importance of master planning in sustainable economic development (Reiss, 2007).

Nevertheless, these development trends have thrown up a variety of planning challenges and problems which have been aired extensively through the popular media, inter-governmental relations, and various public forums. Submissions to a 2007 Senate Standing Committee inquiry into the Airports Amendment Bill articulated an inventory of broader community concerns with the approval mechanisms for airport development under federal control and their disjuncture with wider state and local processes. Local authorities and business groups in particular highlighted issues including (Australian Government, 2007):

- Large-scale commercial developments taking place outside normal planning controls
- Documentation requirements less than for conventional development applications
- Lack of developer contributions for off-airport infrastructure upgrades
- Highly flexible and use-inclusive nature of generalised airport master plans
- Poor community and government consultation
- Role of airports as both proponents and approval authorities for some development

- Lack of independent reviews or third party appeals
- The ‘light-handed’ regulatory approach by the federal government favouring governments
- Lack of urban planning expertise at the Commonwealth level.

5. Land use planning issues in the National Aviation Policy Review

An even more timely opportunity to stocktake community attitudes towards broader planning issues associated with Australian airports has arisen with the National Aviation Policy Review, initiated following a change in the federal government in 2007. In the British Westminster tradition, this Review has produced an ‘Issues Paper’ (April 2008) and a ‘Green Paper’ outlining preliminary proposals (December 2008) en route to a formal policy framework yet to be released. The Review has a wide remit encompassing ten key aviation issues: safety, security, international aviation, domestic and regional aviation, general aviation, industry skills and productivity, consumer protection, aviation emissions and climate change, airport infrastructure and noise impacts. Both the Issues and the Green Paper attracted a significant number of submissions (290 and 220 respectively). Figure 1 shows the level of concern in submissions across the Green Paper’s ten major headings of consideration. Aviation infrastructure attracted the majority of comment. The business sector (airlines, airports, aviation-related bodies, and general business groups including the property industry) provided 73 submissions or 40% of the total. Most remaining submissions came from community (27%) and government (22%) sources.

Our primary focus is on the issues raised under the banner of infrastructure which most directly correlate with matters related land use planning. The government documents hold back from providing any detailed prescriptions; both remain discussion documents seeking to provoke comment. A not untypical treatment is on the issue of airport obligations to surrounding areas. This is raised briefly but not resolved in the Green Paper. Coming under federal jurisdiction, airports are not obliged to pay any levies for augmentation or improvement of off-airport infrastructure commensurate with an expansion of on-airport operations. This departure from the norm has been a sticking point for both state and local authorities. Although airports make sizeable contributions to such capital investment when there is a mutual benefit as well as to

local authorities annually *in lieu* of local taxation, there is a lack of transparency about these payments and a community perception, indeed misperception, that airports are not contributing comparably to other developers. The Green Paper flags an examination of just “how the leased federal airports might contribute to [surrounding transport and community] infrastructure”, although just what is being suggested here is not developed. Given the scale of their investments and general contribution to economic growth, airports would undoubtedly resist any development contributions, certainly for aeronautical infrastructure.

In the Green Paper the government most explicitly espouses a philosophy of balanced planning, stating that “a new level of cooperation is required between federal, state and local government on airport planning and development, with clear consultation and decision making processes”. The rhetoric is what planning theorists might term “collaborative” planning (Healey, 2006), with the Green Paper sprinkled with keywords like “new partnerships”, “improved coordination”, “better integration”, and “a greater sense of shared commitment to the development of the airport site”. The thrust is toward forging a consensus in planning with different stakeholders bringing different expectations and stakeholders to the table. The level of detail about how to actually bring about a convergence of interests is lacking, but several key elements of a more effective planning regime are outlined, including:

- processes for the approval of non-aeronautical and aeronautical development to be refined
- changed arrangements for assessing plans and development proposals
- better cooperative arrangements to integrate airport planning and development and regulatory oversight with local and state and territory planning and regulatory arrangements, possibly through advisory panels
- more consultative arrangements with communities
- a clearer framework for protecting airport operations from inappropriate development
- the Commonwealth to retain decision-making authority for land use planning and development.

5.1 Methodology and overview

Submissions to both policy documents were reviewed using a combination of content and discourse analysis techniques to uncover shared and conflicting ideas, concepts and contentions among and between the main stakeholders. The approach and aim is intended to better document the dimensions of conflict and underscore the need for collaborative policy-making (Butteris et.al., 2001).

A preliminary analysis was undertaken of planning issues raised in the nearly 300 submissions generated by the Issues Paper. A summary of these reveals that the stances largely echo those raised a year earlier in the Senate Inquiry (Table 2). The analysis of the Green Paper submissions was undertaken more deliberatively. Some 220 submissions to the Green Paper were made by the deadline of February 2009, and 210 of these have been made publicly available. Of the latter submissions, a total of 181 (86%) raised “airport infrastructure” concerns. The planning issues raised in these submissions were categorised into 16 specific topics derived from both the contents of the Green Paper and the recording of other airport planning issues raised in the submissions themselves. The discourse was analysed by recording, for each submission, positions or judgements on issues raised, arguments and proposals on issues, and emotional or rhetorical phrases used. Each submission was also classified according to participant type and according to the main airport discussed. The resulting database was then sorted, by participant, issue and airport, to identify competing discourses and potential discourse coalitions. Table 3 identifies and defines the sixteen specific issues identified in order of importance and conveying the broad canvas of opinion on planning-related matters.

Table 4 elaborates by showing the airport-related issues most frequently mentioned overall and their varying significance according to three broad stakeholder groups: business (including the airports), community and government (state and local). Regional airport concerns topped the list with 83 mentions, aided by a letter writing campaign organised by Tourism Tropical North Queensland that accounted for more than two dozen identical submissions from tourism businesses and groups. Regional airport concerns, also mentioned by local councils responsible for managing regional airports, included recognition of the role airports can play in regional

development. Airport pricing was primarily a concern for the business sector, particularly airport companies and the airlines that pay to use their facilities. Similarly, the health impact of airport-related noise was primarily raised by community groups and individuals. The issue was also mentioned by two state governments, but not a single business or business organisation.

While the general heading of aviation infrastructure is inclusive of diverse but interrelated issues, the specific issue of “planning around airports”, which can be used to organise a concern of 70 separate submissions, can be deconstructed into several major concerns (Table 5). Our analysis of these submissions below, orientated to spatial governance issues, draws out significant contrasts between the airports and most other stakeholder’s view of the world, and planning in particular.

5.2 *“Planning around airports”*

The airport (business) submissions provide strong support for continued and singular Commonwealth control over airport planning, although there is nervousness about the application of untested measures such as mooted Ministerial “call-in” powers. Brisbane Airport suggested the Commonwealth should even extend its planning power to cover off-airport proposals compromising airport safety and efficiency. Canberra Airport provided a range of options for planning around airports including a “show cause” mechanism requiring certain developers to fully justify their proposals to the Commonwealth. The airports nonetheless provided some support for better intergovernmental coordination, particularly between Commonwealth and State Governments. The airlines also provided a degree of support for improved intergovernmental coordination. In relation to the new idea of airport planning advisory panels (APAPs), many of the airports opposed their establishment, on the grounds that the groups were unnecessary. Adelaide Airport, with an effective consultative committee mechanism already in place, argued that introducing APAPs carried the “very real risk” of conflict and confusion. Another said that they might foster “uncertainty”. Other airport operators, such as Bankstown and Australian Pacific Airports (Melbourne and Launceston), also expressed concern, arguing that membership of any new player must be independent of local and indeed

State Governments. Airport views on augmenting community consultation proposals were mixed. Australian Pacific Airports suggested that the membership of such groups should include Federal and State Government representatives. The Australian Airports Association argued there must be “safeguards” against airport critics in the groups. Perth warned of the danger of the consultation groups being “hijacked”.

The property industry, government and community submissions were strongly, but not unanimously, opposed to continued sole Commonwealth airport planning control, particularly in relation to commercial developments characterising the evolution towards the ‘airport city’ model (Conway, 1993). The Shopping Centre Council argued that “the most equitable approach” was for non-aeronautical developments to comply with state and local planning laws. Some government submissions indicated that if planning approval role were to stay with the Commonwealth, non-aeronautical developments should at least be tested against state and local laws for consistency. In relation to the idea of a “national land-use planning regime” for airport-related noise, the Western Australian Government said it opposed any shifting of off-airport planning responsibility to the Commonwealth. Almost all of the property industry, government and community submissions, however, supported the proposed APAPs. State government submissions generally said state representatives should be on the panels, while local government submissions predictably proposed council membership. In relation to complementary community consultation groups, state and local governments were supportive but warned of problems already evident with existing ad hoc airport groups. The community group submissions were remarkably even less enthusiastic for the same reason. While most supported improved community consultation, they were highly critical of existing airport community consultation groups and processes.

5.3 Airports and their regions

Although indirectly reflected in the interrelated scatter of specific concerns (Table 3), only a relatively small number of submissions explicitly commended integrated airport area development as a desirable Review outcome (Table 5). The strongest endorsements came from

local government interests, of which three are representative. The Australian Mayoral Aviation Council said that “no airport exists only within the boundary fence” and that planning processes need to better coordinate conflicting objectives of airports and surrounding communities. The Australian Local Government Association maintained that “airports in urban areas are major generators of employment & traffic and therefore must be properly integrated into local and city wide plans”. Brisbane City Council specifically wanted a “well-balanced framework to enable an effective and sustainable integration of Brisbane Airport with the urban fabric of Brisbane City and the (South-East Queensland) region”. The Urban Taskforce, a national business lobby group, provided an expansive view of airport related land use planning beyond noise considerations in arguing that “growth, commerce and industry must not be unrealistically restricted near airports and it is the role of planning to facilitate the right type of development”.

This issue of rationalised spatial governance which goes to the heart of a more synergistic model of planning at the airport-city interface is barely touched upon. The issue is nowhere explicitly canvassed within the Policy Review, perhaps partly because of the inherited notion that the federal government avoids involvement in state and local land use planning issues except where operational matters are concerned. As a result, the Green Paper largely treats airports in a rather traditional fashion as entities disconnected from the broader metropolitan and regional fabric, despite emphasizing their importance for economic development and their potential disbenefits in environmental amenity terms. Beyond the airport boundary, the formal interest conveyed by the Green Paper narrows very sharply to noise, building height, and flightpaths (exemplifying the remarks of the senior bureaucrat quoted earlier). In this sense it conveys an unbalanced or at least incomplete vision. The primary concern is negatively fixated on preventing incompatibility rather than more pro-actively promoting compatibility.

6. Towards new models of land use planning

The “balanced” philosophy of future aviation policy in relation to airport planning and development appears to hinge on several projected initiatives (Australian Government, 2008b):

- better coordinative mechanisms for airport planning and community consultation
- strengthening the Master Plan process, through providing more transparency and detail in master plans, and folding in transport impact studies and airport environmental strategies
- revising the triggers for Major Development Plans, by replacing the current single \$20m threshold with a range of other “triggers” for smaller projects which might nonetheless of significant community interest
- identification of non-compatible land uses which should be prohibited or restricted on airports
- closer scrutiny of non-aeronautical development, with requirements for more detailed precinct plans identifying and mitigating impacts on and off-airport
- a national framework to safeguard airports from inappropriate and encroaching development around airport sites
- better managing impact of aircraft noise on local communities, through a multiple stakeholder approach and drawing from better noise data.

Just how these will be translated specifically into guidelines or requirements of a new national policy framework and how national-state-local stakeholders will be better managed is not yet clear. It is highly unlikely that the Commonwealth will cede planning powers for airports to the two lower tiers of government, yet there is ambiguity as to whether new national policy will apply just to the federal airports or the entire airport system. Certainly the new private lessees of the former FAC airports would strenuously resist any truly revolutionary reconfiguration of rights and responsibilities potentially impacting on their current multi-million dollar leasehold arrangements.

Again, the absence of a spatial dimension is limiting (City Futures Research Centre, 2009). Internationally, there is widespread disillusionment with conventional planning instruments which often lack integrative power in airport regions (De Jong et al., 2008; van Wijk, 2008). New forms of area governance based on inter-governmental coordination and private-public partnerships lead the way towards more collaborative approaches to regulation and development which recognise the complex interdependencies of airport regions. The Schiphol Airport area

continues to provide a benchmark with a regional spatial economic plan (RFVS) providing mutual guidance for forward planning on the nature and location of airport-related employment zones, metropolitan rail expansion, accommodation of mixed use development, and provision of regional open space (Schaafsma et al., 2008).

There are some extant initiatives of this kind of integrated area planning in Australia. Two examples are, first, in planning for a joint commercial-defence airport at Newcastle north of Sydney and second, the Botany Bay City portion of the Sydney Airport sub-region. At Newcastle, an innovative 100 ha Defence and Airport Related Employment Zone (DAREZ) recognised in a new local environmental plan for Port Stephens Shire is intended to provide opportunities for establishment of employment generating activities supporting airport and air force base whilst ensuring high environmental safeguards. It is the outcome of a systematic approach initiated by an economic opportunities study in 2003 followed by a land use development strategy undertaken in 2006-2007 which progressed from site alternatives through land capability assessments to a structure plan and development control framework guided by a reference group with representatives of all key public and private stakeholders (GHD, 2008). Implementation of the master plan will be facilitated by a single developer. Newcastle is not a federal airport and the approach here is testimony to a simpler governance arrangement under state legislation whilst still addressing national needs through the participation of the Department of Defence.

A recently released planning strategy for the City of Botany Bay adjacent to Sydney Airport identifies “maintaining Sydney Airport as a global gateway” as one of seven major sub-regional objectives (SGS Planning and Economics, 2009). The report comments on a “policy vacuum for offsite issues and impacts associated with the Airport’s continued expansion” caused by Commonwealth control of airport planning. For the immediate off-airport zone, it calculates a significant under-supply of land to accommodate future airport-related freight activity and documents other problems needing to be addressed, including poor amenity and urban design, uncoordinated development, lack of local amenities, limited office development, and the absence of a “gateway experience” – in effect the typical symptoms of brownfields airport fringe area.

Within a spatial framework complementing State recognition of the airport areas as a specialised activity centre of metropolitan significance (NSW Department of Planning, 2005), various recommendations are made to protect existing employment zones, open up new employment locations to accommodate growth in demand for airport-related activity, develop a new transit-oriented mixed use centre, and enhanced public domain and streetscape improvements. A significant limitation is that Botany Bay is just one of three local councils contiguous to the airport – this ultimately remains a single rather than joint stakeholder strategy. Moreover a new statewide template for local planning schemes to be introduced in 2011 does not include a category of aviation-related uses.

Such spatial frameworks are seemingly below the radar of national aviation thinking in Australia. Nevertheless, they signpost the kind of sub-regional approach desirable to fully realise the economic and social development of airport regions in ways that are not just about noise mitigation. They could provide guidance to new planning advisory and consultation bodies likely to be established. Moreover, such frameworks might go a long way to more coherently addressing the many land use planning issues in the vicinity of airports (Table 3).

7. Conclusion

There are numerous challenges confronting land use planning around Australian airports. Although these are not unique in global terms, the extent to which current conflicts have their historical origins in a national basis of land ownership with its own planning regime largely independent of state and local controls appears to be a distinctively Australian manifestation.

There are two distinct discourses on airport planning evident. The airport businesses generally believe that existing airport planning is effective and they are uneasy at any major “moving of the (regulatory) goal posts”. They want a regulatory framework that provides investor certainty, and continued Commonwealth control, but do see some merit in better integration of on- and off-airport planning. They want state and local governments, however, to accept their fair share of responsibility for land-use and transport planning with off-airport planning needing to be

improved to ensure safe and efficient airport operations. On the other hand, the property industry, state and local governments, and communities believe existing airport planning is inadequate. They want a regulatory regime that is fair and consistent with state planning laws as applied to other land uses, including major infrastructure developments such as ports . They can see some merit in better integration of off- and on-airport planning to increase safety for airports and nearby residents. However they want new airport planning and consultation measures to reduce the risks from airport developments and noise. They argue such measures are necessary to increase certainty for surrounding businesses and communities. Our stance is that in seeking a common platform of fairness, certainty and transparency that the opportunity is not lost to recognise the broader planning implications and governance questions of airports in their spatial settings.

The challenge ahead for Australian aviation policy-makers will be to promote constructive collaboration in planning for sustainable airport regions. Although holistic airport area strategies have not emerged as a major topic of deliberation though the National Aviation Review in 2008-09, they nonetheless constitute one procedural innovation which could provide a more effective framework for integrating the host of economic, environmental and social considerations, including the realisation and rationalisation of area development potential, involved in the better planning of airport regions.

Note

The paper reports on one facet of a major research project 2007-2011 entitled ‘The Airport Metropolis: Managing the Interfaces’ headquartered at the Queensland University of Technology and supported by the Australian Research Council. An earlier version was presented at the ‘From Airport City to Airport Region’ colloquium held at the University of Karlsruhe in July 2009. We acknowledge the research assistance of Peggy James in the analysis of submissions to the “Green Paper”.

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Table 1

Major Airport Development Plans approved by the Commonwealth Government 2003-2008

Airport	Development	Approval date
Darwin	Home and Lifestyle Super Centre	2007-08*
Brisbane	Domestic Terminal Expansion	2007-08*
Darwin	Domestic Terminal Expansion	2007-08*
Sydney	Runway End Safety Area	2007-08*
Adelaide	Airport Hotel Complex	2007-08*
Brisbane	Multi-level Car Park Domestic Terminal	2007-08*
Canberra	15 Lancaster Place - office complex	18-Apr-08
Hobart	Outlet Centre and Bulky Goods/Homemaker Centre	08-Oct-07
Brisbane	Federal office building	28-Sep-07
Brisbane	Hotel Precinct - No. 1 Airport Drive	28-Sep-07
Brisbane	Parallel runway	18-Sep-07
Gold Coast	Terminal expansion	10-Sep-07
Perth	Linfox warehouse and distribution centre	8-Aug-07
Melbourne	DHL Danzas freight facility (MDP minor variation)	25-Jul-07
Melbourne	Mixed use development	13-Jul-07
Canberra	Southern office complex	26-May-07
Brisbane	Convenience centre	27-Mar-07
Hobart	Checked baggage screening facility	12-Feb-07
Brisbane	Northern access roads project	27-Sep-06
Brisbane	Gateway upgrade project	13-Sep-06
Brisbane	International terminal/concourse extension	5-Sep-06
Perth	Clay Manufacturing Plant	15-Aug-06
Perth	Coles Myer Distribution Centre	24-Jul-06
Brisbane	Multi-level car park	20-Jun-06
Canberra	Factory Outlet Centre	26-Apr-06

Canberra	Runway extension, minor variation	4-Apr-06
Melbourne	Reject Shop Distribution Centre	1-Mar-06
Melbourne	DHL Danzas Air and Ocean Freight Facility	1-Mar-06
Gold Coast	Tugun bypass	20-Feb-06
Essendon	Bulla Road, minor variation	13-Oct-05
Sydney KSA	Car park - international precinct	13-Apr-05
Adelaide	IKEA store	1-Feb-05
Parafield	Cross Keys works	19-Jan-05
Essendon	Bulla Road commercial - retail development	16-Dec-04
Melbourne	Office development	12-Nov-04
Gold Coast	Runway works	8-Nov-04
Canberra	Runway works	25-Aug-04
Brisbane	Direct factory outlet	25-Jun-04
Melbourne	International mail sorting facility	16-Jun-04
Brisbane	Virgin Blue hangar	11-May-04
Perth	Woolworths warehousing and distribution park	14-Nov-03
Canberra	Terminal expansion	4-Nov-03

Source: Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government's 2007-08 Annual Report, and website(*), June 2009.

Table 2

Planning issues raised in submissions to the Australian National Aviation Review Issues Paper

State and local government:

- Lack of effective integration between federal, state and local planning regimes
- Local communities having to meet off site infrastructure costs to support airport expansion in the absence of mandatory developer contributions
- Competitive advantage gained by airports conducting non-aviation based activities over commercial rivals that are subject to jurisdictional planning controls
- Master Plans and Major Development Plans lack specific detail and accompanying traffic and similar studies required for developments of a similar scale proposed for land outside airports.
- Poor consultation with local communities over development proposals, especially for developments worth less than \$20m

Airports:

- The airports supported continuation of the 'light-handed' regulatory regime
- Complications and delays caused by operation of the interaction between the Airports Act and the Environment Planning and Biodiversity Conservation Act
- Greater coordination of off-airport land use planning to prevent residential creep and high-rise encroachment on airspace

Airlines and operators:

- Aeronautical requirements of airports and airlines should take precedence over non-aeronautical developments of airports.
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Table 3

A categorisation of airport planning issues raised in submissions to the Australian Government's Green paper on Aviation Policy (2009), ranked ordered by the number of substantive mentions in submissions (in parentheses)

Regional Airports: including significance of regional airports to regional development, international access to regional airports, desirability and cost of security measures, and funding programs for regional and remote airports (83).

Planning Around Airports: including risk-based planning of off-airport development to allow for airport operation & growth, public safety zones around airports, planning under flight paths and to manage noise exposure, and general planning of airport regions (but not off-airport infrastructure planning) (70).

Airport-Related Noise Mitigation: including desirability and operation of curfews, noise-insulation programs and industry funding for noise mitigation and compensation (65).

Airport Community Consultation: including desirability of establishing airport community consultation groups, compositions, roles and responsibilities, and procedural matters (64).

Government Responsibilities in Airport Planning: including desirability of Commonwealth control over airport planning, jurisdiction over non-aeronautical development on airport land, intergovernmental coordination for airport-related development and Local Government control of smaller airports (64).

Non-Aeronautical Uses at Airports: including potential impacts on aeronautical uses, desirability or need for non-aeronautical uses, and competition with similar uses outside airports (55).

Airport Investment and Growth: Including impacts on investment from global financial crisis, oil depletion, and proposed regulatory changes, significance of non-aeronautical revenues to investment, desirability of airport investment/growth & alternatives to airport investments (54).

Airport-Related Noise Information Tools: including adequacy of Australian Noise Exposure Forecasts as planning information tools, web-based flight path information tools, the Transport Noise Information Package and providing noise exposure advice to home-buyers (53).

Off-Airport Transport and Community Infrastructure: including extent of airport impacts on surrounding infrastructure, infrastructure funding responsibilities and integrating planning of on- and off-airport infrastructure (53).

Airport Master Planning: including accuracy and transparency of master plans, level of detail in master plans, and desirability of proposed changes to master planning including precinct plans (51).

Airport Planning Advisory Panels: including desirability of establishing panels, composition, roles and responsibilities, and funding (43).

Second Sydney Airport and Sydney Airport Capacity: including desirability of second Sydney airport, alternatives to a second Sydney airport and possible locations (42).

General Aviation at Airports: including significance of and provision for General Aviation (GA) at airports, noise from GA activities, location of GA airports (40).

Airport Development Control: including review of major development plan triggers, call-in power for sensitive developments and prohibition of incompatible uses on airport land (38).

Airport Pricing: including desirability of more extensive price monitoring, price monitoring of airport car parking, and proposed 'show cause' process for pricing misbehaviour (31).

Airport-Related Noise and Health Impacts: including health impacts of aviation noise, studies of health impacts, and use of health risk assessment for airport developments (14).

Table 4

Most frequently mentioned airport issues in submissions to the National Aviation Review Policy Green Paper (rank order of importance by stakeholder group)

Major airport planning	Business submissions	Community submissions	Government submissions
Regional Airports	1	13	1
Planning around Airports	2	9	2
Noise Mitigation	7	1	6
Community Consultation	10	2	10
Government responsibilities	4	5	4
Non-aeronautical uses	12	12	3
Airport Investment and Growth	3	4	13
Noise information	13	3	7
Off-Airport infrastructure	14	10	5
Airport Master Planning	8	8	9
Airport Planning	5	15	8
Advisory Panels			
Second Sydney Airport	9	11	12
General Aviation Airports	15	6	14
Airport Development	11	14	11
Control			
Airport Pricing	6	16	15
Noise and Health Impacts	16	7	16

Table 5

Major concerns with planning around airports nominated in Green Paper submissions

Issue	No. of comments
Safeguard against incompatible development important	28
Planning for noise attenuation important	17
Need for coordinated area planning and impact assessment in airport vicinity	15
Supports public safety zones	9
Supports review of ANEF standards	6
Supports risk based land use framework	6
Need to conserve natural environment	1

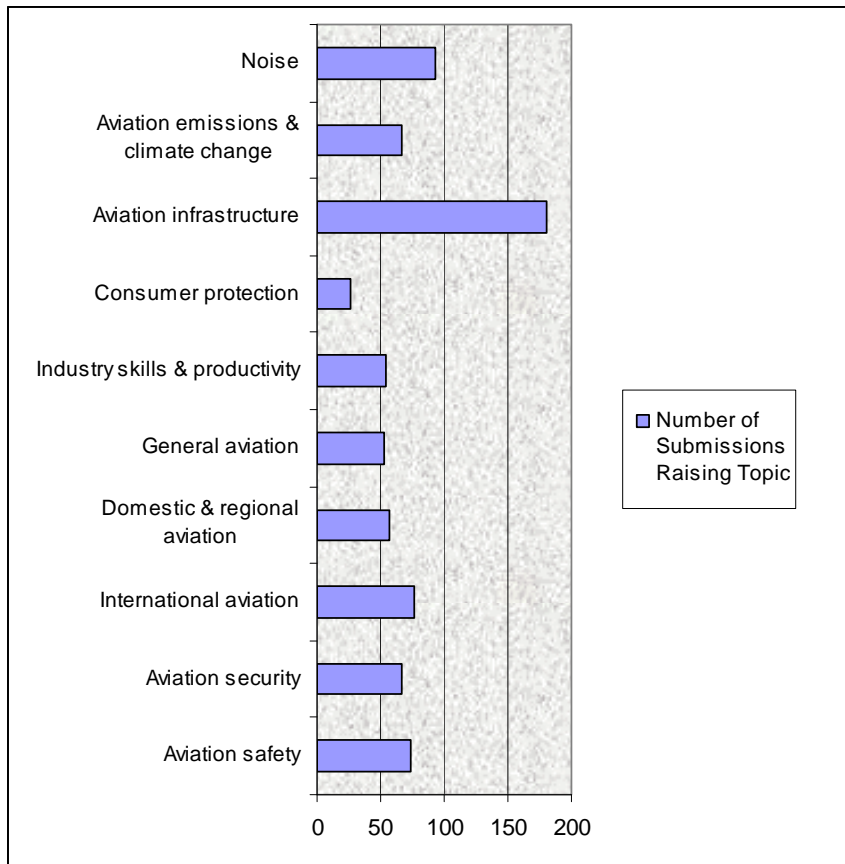


Fig. 1: Concern about airport Infrastructure and other Issues in Green Paper submissions